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Solid Wood Products

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Report Highlights:

Thailand's solid wood product imports may have a lack of growth in 2001 and 2002. However, imports are anticipated to increase in the next 3-5 years.

Includes PSD changes: Yes Includes Trade Matrix: Yes Annual Report Bangkok [TH1], TH

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Thai government, influenced by the Royal Family, has modified its forest management policy in recent years. Instead of utilizing only government officers to protect the forest land, the encouragement of protection participation by people was introduced. In addition to several private reforestation projects, the education campaigns have been conducted continuously in both the mass media and in schools in order to stimulate Thai communities to realize the need of forest conservation. Although these campaigns could have reduced illegal deforestation gradually, the success in increasing net forest area in the country for years to come is still in doubt, due to an economic downturn for Thailand which began in 1997.

Thailand's solid wood product imports may have a lack of growth in 2001 and 2002, due to vulnerable conditions of the Thai and global economies. However, imports are anticipated to increase in the next 3-5 years, when the world economy may recover and supply availabilities of domestic solid woods are somewhat inconsistent.

There is a high potential for increasing U.S. hardwood imports in the Thai market, due to the import trend and their competitiveness in price and quality. However, the market strategies in promoting U.S. hardwoods in Thailand need to be directed toward overcoming a lack of understanding of U.S. woods, in the areas of U.S. grading system, physical properties, applications, and the color variations of the countless U.S. species of hardwood. Education should be a key component of a market promotion plan. The American Hardwood Export Council (AHEC) should focus on educating the right people with the right products.

PRODUCTION

Forest Situation/Outlook

Thailand underwent a massive deforestation between 1961 and 1989 which eradicated over a half of its forest area through logging concessions and illegal logging. In 1989, when the Thai Government decided to abolish the concession for commercial logging in all government forest areas, the forest area accounted for 27.95 percent of total area for the kingdom (excluding rubber plantation area). Since then, illegal logging and encroachment activities have continued and caused the forest area to decline further. The Royal Forest Department (RFD) reports that the existing forest area in 1998 (the latest data) was 129,722 square kilometers, accounting for 25.28 percent of total area. However, the forest area, by the government's definition, does not include rubber plantation area of 19,562 square kilometers in 1998. The total forest area were reportedly composed of tropical evergreen forest (40 percent), mixed deciduous forest (34 percent), dry dipterocarp forest (21 percent), and others (5 percent), respectively.

Prior to 1989, the Thai Government had fought with the deforestation crisis in inefficient ways. The government began reforestation projects in depleted forest land and tried to stop illegal logging and encroachment activities by arresting cutters and intruders. The Forest Industry Organization (FIO) was also established in 1947 for the purposes of reforestation and commercial logging. Nevertheless, illegal deforestation have continued and led to decreasing forest area, due to a lack of good sustainable forest management, corruption, and increased demand for agricultural land use.

Influenced by the Royal Family, the government has modified its forest management policy in recent years. Instead of utilizing only government officers to protect the forest land, the encouragement of protection participation by people was introduced. The government initiated the Private Reforestation Project in 1992 and the Reforestation Campaign in Commemoration of the Royal Golden Jubilee for the King in 1996 (see details in the 2000 Solid Wood Products Annual Report). The education campaigns have been conducted continuously in both the mass media and in schools in order to stimulate Thai communities to realize the need of forest conservation. In response to the King's recommendation, the government also initiated the project called "community forest". This project is designed to deal with villagers who live in or nearby forest lands. Under the project, the government will encourage those villagers to control the use of forest and protect forest area on their own, through education and financial support. Although most informed sources indicated that these campaigns could reduce illegal deforestation gradually, the success in increasing net forest area in the country for years to come is still in doubt. This is based on the fact that the current economic downturn for Thailand has affected the government's budget on several projects, including those for reforestation and other forest protection activities. Meanwhile, the financial problems have also slow downed private reforestation activities in the past several years.

Solid Wood Products Situation/Outlook

Because the government bans commercial logging in national forest areas and nearly all trees on private reforested land are immature for commercial cutting, supplies of domestic hardwood timber are currently derived from timber from the FIO's logging and thinning in their reforested area, and that which is confiscated from illegal logging. According to the RFD, production of timber (by-license and confiscated timber) declined in recent years, reflecting a lack of mature reforested trees and the RFD's sophisticated regulation on logging approval. Total timber production in 2000 was 46,370 cubic meters, a slight decrease from 50,200 cubic meters in 1999. Almost half of production in 2000 was teak, while the balance went into other reserved species and non-reserved species. The outlook of domestic timber production from forest areas in the next 3-5 years may increase to about 50,000-66,000 cubic meters, following increased timber from private reforested area.

As a result of a ban on commercial logging in national forest areas, the Thai furniture industry has struggled to develop the use of parawood timber from rubber plantation to substitute for typical timber from forest area. Parawood timber, which is considered as hardwood, is derived from rubber trees which reach their maturity for rubber tapping (at 20-25 years of age). Chips and small leftover pieces from parawood milling are used to make MDF and particle board. Due to ample supplies of mature rubber trees, production of parawood has increased significantly in the past decade. Production of parawood lumber in 2001 is likely to be about 1.8 million cubic meters in 2001. Due to a downward trend in rubber tree cutting, parawood rubber production may decline in the next 3-5 years.

TRADE

Due to the vulnerable outlook of the Thai and global economies, Thailand's solid wood product imports (especially hardwood logs and lumber) may have a lack of growth in 2001 and 2002. However, imports are anticipated to increase in the next 3-5 years, when the world economy may recover and supply availabilities of domestic solid woods are somewhat inconsistent.

Based on the fact that the Thai economy is expected to grow only by 1.5-2.0 percent in 2001, as opposed to 4.3 percent in 2000, domestic demand for wooden products has been sluggish in 2001. Although most policy makers are optimistic that the Thai economy should grow at a faster pace, this is still questionable for 2002. The bottom line is that the domestic financial sector is still weak (with 30-40 percent of total loans being non-performing loans), and the national foreign debt has climbed in recent years (currently about 56 percent of GDP). In addition, a downturn in the global economy is likely to reduce Thai exports of wooden products in 2001, which parallels a need to import logs and lumber as raw materials.

As indicated in Table 7, 8, 9, and 10 under the Statistical Information Section, 62 percent of total imports of solid wood commodities (by value) in 2000 belong to wood lumber, followed by logs (34 percent), veneer sheets (3 percent), and plywood (1 percent), respectively. It is apparent that imports of total solid wood products increased sharply in 2000, due mainly to

the booming exports of wooden products (including wooden furniture, frames, flooring materials, etc.). Imports of logs in 2000 increased in value by 47 percent to US\$ 141.44 million, while those of lumber grew by 28 percent to US\$ 257.98 million. Imports of U.S. lumber also increased significantly from US\$ 22.44 million in 1999 to US\$ 34.56 million, accounting for about 13 percent of total lumber imports.

Thailand's neighboring countries (i.e., Malaysia, Myanmar, Cambodia, Laos, and Indonesia) remain major suppliers of hardwoods to Thailand. Hardwoods imported from Malaysia and Indonesia are mainly used for construction purposes. Meanwhile, high-value tropical hardwoods (such as teak, rose wood, and Ma-ka) are normally imported from Myanmar, Laos, and Cambodia, and used in the furniture and interior design industries. The U.S. supplies solid wood products, mainly hardwood lumber, to Thailand. Most of the imported U.S. hardwoods in 2000 are in species of oak, maple, poplar, and ash. U.S. hardwoods are good for making flooring materials, furniture, wooden frames, picture frames, and interior design materials.

It is estimated that about 70 percent of imported U.S. hardwoods are now utilized by export-oriented manufacturers, while the balance belongs to domestic-oriented manufacturers. The export-oriented manufacturers import U.S. hardwoods and other temperate hardwoods to make wooden products (especially wooden furniture and picture frames) for export. As U.S. woods are mostly competitive in both quality and price against other temperate hardwoods, the demand for imported U.S. hardwoods would certainly parallel the production of wooden products for export. Contrarily, the utilization of U.S. hardwoods by domestic-oriented manufacturers is still limited by a lack of understanding of U.S. woods, in the areas of the U.S. grading system, physical properties, applications, and the color variations of the countless U.S. species of hardwood. For example, demand for U.S. hardwoods (mainly oak and ash woods) for making flooring materials dropped sharply in recent years, as many local users were disappointed with the appearance and endurance of finished flooring. In reality, according to trade sources, this problem can be avoided if the user is better informed of the physical properties and appropriate application of U.S. woods.

Trade sources believe that there is a high potential for U.S. hardwood imports to grow in the Thai market, due to their competitiveness in price and quality. Although domestic consumption of high-value wooden products (such as flooring materials, furniture, and interior design) are dominated by teak/rose wood, the expensive and rising prices for these tropical hardwoods may encourage users to seek new types of hardwoods. However, the market strategies in promoting U.S. hardwoods in Thailand need to be directed toward overcoming the limitations as mentioned above. Education should be a key component of market promotion plan. The American Hardwood Export Council (AHEC) should focus on educating the right people with the right products. Organizing a big conference (to recite the knowledge of U.S. grading system) is not as effective as having direct discussion/workshops with such target group

as wood importers, architects, interior designers, etc. The workshop should be directed to the proper application of specific U.S. hardwoods and their cost-benefit value. In addition, AHEC may need to focus on certain species of U.S. hardwoods, but not all of them. For example, according to trade sources, U.S. oak wood has the highest strength for market promotion due to its competitiveness in price and quality, and consistent supplies.

MARKET SEGMENT ANALYSIS

Construction Sector

After Thailand's economic crisis in 1997 led to a massive surplus in residential and commercial projects from 1997-1999, the real estate industry began to recover in 2000 and continued to grow in 2001. This stems from the fact that:

- 1) Overall interest rates for both deposits and loans have decreased sharply in the past few years, due to high liquidity in the financial market. Reduced deposit rates stimulated some wealthy people to withdraw their money for spending (including buying houses for the purpose of their new residence or for speculation). Meanwhile, reduced loan rates encouraged a group of medium-income people to borrow and buy a house, mostly for their own residence. The current time deposit rates are relatively low at 2.0-3.5 percent (against 10.0-13.0 percent in 1997), while the minimum retail rates (MRR) are 7.0-8.5 percent (as opposed to 15.0-16.0 percent in 1997).
- 2) The government has initiated a few measures to revitalize the real estate industry in anticipation of its impact on economic growth. A tax on registration for housing ownership was reduced in 2000, from 2 percent of assessed value to 0.01 percent. Recently, the government allowed buyers of residential/commercial buildings to count a certain amount of payment (100,000-200,000 baht) as annual spending for their personal income tax calculation. In the case that the buyers represent a company, they are allowed to deduct 20 percent of the assessed property value as an initial allowance for the corporate income tax calculation. In addition, the Government Housing Bank would provide special loan rates and repayments term for all government employees.

A recent survey indicated that the opening of new housing projects in Bangkok and vicinity more than doubled from 1,357 units in 1999 to 3,040 units in 2000. As there were no residential condominium projects in 2000, all of these projects belong to the construction of homes and town houses. Based on the survey for the first quarter of 2001, the number of housing starts may reach 4,000-4,500 units in 2001. In addition, a private real estate dealer reported that the vacancy rate of office condominiums in Bangkok and vicinity was 31 percent in March 2001 (against 37 percent in early 2000), while that of residential condominiums dropped to 27 percent (against about 50 percent in 2000).

Thai developers and consumers are in favor of masonry and other non-wood materials in building house structures. While old-style wood-frame houses (mostly seen in rural areas and constructed of tropical wood products) are less popular, modern-style houses (such as log home or house resort) are a potential market for imported temperate hardwoods although they are still limited by the high construction cost. However, Post believes that flooring materials should be

the best market prospect for U.S. hardwoods. This outlook is based on the fact that: 1) the market for wooden flooring materials has become very large. The survey revealed that total area of new housing units in municipal territories across the country was 4.81 million square meters in 2000, up from 3.75 million square meters in 1999; 2) due to increasing back-to-nature perspective, people would prefer wooden floors for their houses to artificial materials; 3) a trend of increased numbers of expensive houses and the growing house-contractor business should favor the demand for wooden flooring materials; and 4) flooring materials made from U.S. hardwoods are relatively inexpensive.

Furniture & Interior Sector

Due to a ban on commercial logging in national forest areas in late 1980's, the furniture industry in Thailand has changed dramatically. In addition to a switch to imported hardwoods, several furniture makers diversified their raw material use into parawood, medium density fiberboard (MDF), metal, rattan, etc. Regarding wooden furniture, parawood furniture currently accounts for about 60 percent of total production, followed by hardwood furniture (20 percent) and panel furniture (20 percent). Thailand has also diversified its furniture industry toward export-oriented manufacturing. It is estimated that about 70 percent of total wooden furniture production is now for export, with the balance going to domestic consumption.

Despite a continued strong hotel business, total domestic sales of furniture and interior design products has been sluggish in 2001, due to overall unfavorable economic situations. Several individual consumers delayed their spending on new furniture and house renovation. Otherwise, the spending would favor the use of low-to-decent quality products, mostly parawood furniture. As nearly all parawood furniture is derived from local raw materials, it has a cost advantage over other wooden furniture products, especially in 2001 when the Thai currency has weakened by 10-15 percent from last year's level. However, a reduction in household consumption is partly offset by increased consumption for hotel/resort markets. A booming tourism industry in recent years has led to active building renovation and furniture replacement in many hotels/resorts in 2001. The outlook for total furniture and interior design demand in 2002 is still unclear, depending on the likelihood of global and Thai economic performance.

After a 16 percent growth in 2000 following a devaluation of Thai currency, exports of wooden products, including furniture, are expected to decline slightly (in US dollar terms) in 2001. Exports of wooden furniture and parts in the first half of 2001 (Jan-Jun) decreased by 13 percent from the same period in 2000, to US\$ 285 million. Meanwhile, exports of other wood products (i.e., wooden construction materials, picture frames, tableware and kitchenware, carvings and ornaments) dropped by 7 percent, to US 156 million. The U.S. and Japan are the largest importers of Thai wood products (35 percent for each), followed by EU countries (18 percent). The outlook for Thai wooden product exports in 2002 is still questionable following

the recent slowdown in the global economy. As U.S. hardwoods are used mainly in furniture and interior design industries, for both domestic consumption and re-export, demand for U.S. hardwoods in these industries may decline in 2001. However, Thailand should increase the use of U.S. hardwoods in the next 3-5 years, in anticipation of growing Thai wooden product exports and a recovery in domestic consumption.

Material Handling Industry

Wooden pallets are normally used for packaging heavy or easily-broken products, especially in the shipping industry for export. As most exported products in Thailand are light-industry products and the use of alternative plastic or foam material has increased in popularity, the use of wood in the material handling industry is still limited. Due to relatively high transportation costs, the United States' solid woods are not competitive against domestic woods and those from Thailand's neighboring countries in the material handling industry. Reflecting an estimated decrease in Thai exports of electronic and computer equipments, the utilization of solid woods in packing materials should decline from estimated 100,000 cubic meters in 2000 to 90,000 cubic meters in 2001, nearly all of which are paranoid and plywood.

STATISTICAL INFORMATION

Table 1: Thailand's Strategic Indicator Table

See attached table "fortabls.wk4".

Table 2: PS&D Table for Tropical Hardwood Logs

PSD Table						
Country	Thailand					
Commodity	Tropical Hardwo	od Logs			1000 CUBIC MI	ETERS
	Revise	d2000	Prelimin	Preliminary2001		st2002
	Old	New	Old	New	Old	New
Market Year Begin	01/2000		01/2001		01/2002	
Production	34	4950	0	4850	0	4800
Imports	125	714	0	600	0	700
TOTAL SUPPLY	159	5664	0	5450	0	5500
Exports	0	0	0	0	0	0
Domestic Consumption	159	5664	0	5450	0	5500
TOTAL DISTRIBUTION	159	5664	0	5450	0	5500

Table 3: PS&D Table for Temperate Hardwood Lumber

PSD Table						
Country	Thailand					
Commodity	Temperate Hard	wood Lumber			1000 CUBIC M	ETERS
	Revise	ed2000	Prelimin	nary2001	Foreca	ast2002
	Old	New	Old	New	Old	New
Market Year Begin	01/2000		01/2001		01/2002	
Production	10	10	10	8	0	5
Imports	3200	60	70	60	0	70
TOTAL SUPPLY	3210	70	80	68	0	75
Exports	65	10	0	5	0	5
Domestic Consumption	3145	60	80	63	0	70
TOTAL DISTRIBUTION	3210	70	80	68	0	75

Table 4: PS&D Table for Tropical hardwood Lumber

PSD Table						
Country	Thailand					
Commodity	Tropical Hardwo	ood Lumber			1000 CUBIC MI	ETERS
	Revised	2000	Preliminary	2001	Forecast	2002
	Old	New	Old	New	Old	New
Market Year Begin		01/2000		01/2001		01/2002
Production	5312	2380	2260	2280	0	2200
Imports	290	1000	1450	1200	0	1100
TOTAL SUPPLY	5602	3380	3710	3480	0	3300
Exports	4690	350	200	400	0	300
Domestic Consumption	912	3030	3510	3080	0	3000
TOTAL DISTRIBUTION	5602	3380	3710	3480	0	3300

Table 5: PS&D Table for Hardwood Veneer

PSD Table						
Country	Thailand					
Commodity	Hardwood Vene	er			1000 CUBIC M	ETERS
	Revise	ed2000	Prelimin	ary2001	Foreca	ast2002
	Old	New	Old	New	Old	New
Market Year Begin	01/2000		01/2001		01/2002	
Production	145	145	150	135	0	145
Imports	18	15	20	15	0	10
TOTAL SUPPLY	163	160	170	150	0	155
Exports	3	2	2	2	0	2
Domestic Consumption	160	158	168	148	0	153
TOTAL DISTRIBUTION	163	160	170	150	0	155

Table 6: PS&D Table for Hardwood Plywood

PSD Table						
Country	Thailand					
Commodity	Hardwood Plyw	ood			1000 CUBIC M	ETERS
	Revise	ed2000	Prelimin	ary2001	Foreca	ast2002
	Old	New	Old	New	Old	New
Market Year Begin	01/2000		01/2001		01/2002	
Production	85	85	90	80	0	85
Imports	3	8	3	5	0	5
TOTAL SUPPLY	88	93	93	85	0	90
Exports	2	3	2	2	0	2
Domestic Consumption	86	90	91	83	0	88
TOTAL DISTRIBUTION	88	93	93	85	0	90

Table 7: Thailand's Log Im	ports in 1999 and 2000	1			
Origin	1999		2000		
5	Quantity	Value	Quantity	Value	
	(Cubic Meters)	(US\$ 1,000)	(Cubic Meters)	(US\$ 1,000)	
U.S.A.	572	378	753	595	
Malaysia	135,559	17,731	149,385	17,684	
Myanmar	123,705	52,476	151,562	72,716	
Laos	86,156	12,198	223,215	29,002	
New Zealand	61,474	4,056	85,226	6,108	
Indonesia	6,212	788	56,401	7,103	
South Africa	11,953	1,939	0	0	
Australia	15,304	960	7,290	526	
Papua New Guinea	11,147	1,582	16,174	3,076	
Mauritania	2,293	1,260	299	66	
Solomon Islands	5,504	752	12,124	1,766	
Others	8,763	2,025	11,172	2,793	
TOTAL	468,642	96,145	713,601	141,435	

Table 8: Thailand's Lumbe	r Imports in 1999 and 2000				
Origin	1999		2000		
	Quantity	Value	Quantity	Value	
	(Cubic Meters)	(US\$ 1,000)	(Cubic Meters)	(US\$ 1,000)	
U.S.A.	104,839	22,436	72,227	34,555	
Malaysia	876,672	116,770	647,721	130,006	
Myanmar	13,833	9,180	15,766	10,321	
Laos	141,796	25,725	230,458	39,542	
New Zealand	46,372	6,651	52,196	9,630	
Cambodia	15,731	4,198	8,320	2,584	
China	5,163	3,140	4,943	3,005	
Brazil	13,980	2,934	38,828	8,970	
Indonesia	7,694	1,906	17,378	4,104	
Canada	13,004	2,432	14,360	3,015	
Poland	1,968	745	1,829	1,013	
Australia	1,689	628	2,684	1,112	
Others	12,258	5,282	36,537	10,127	
TOTAL	1,254,999	202,027	1,143,247	257,984	

Origin	1999		2000		
	Quantity	Value	Quantity	Value	
	(Cubic Meters)	(US\$ 1,000)	(Cubic Meters)	(US\$ 1,000)	
U.S.A.	557	1,294	1,032	2,820	
Indonesia	2,497	3,953	1,936	3,369	
Malaysia	4,742	805	3,562	1,370	
Finland	869	783	1,495	1,320	
Italy	37	343	43	212	
Taiwan	62	75	61	85	
Germany	331	654	226	742	
China	1,610	1,142	1,006	924	
Brazil	1,418	774	2,075	1,049	
Myanmar	1,323	438	1,782	783	
Canada	121	259	30	91	
India	33	25	0	0	
Others	290	837	1,859	1,707	
TOTAL	13,890	11,382	15,107	14,472	

Table 10: Thailand's Plywoo	od Imports in 1999 and 200	00		
Origin	1999		2000	
	Quantity	Value	Quantity	Value
	(Cubic Meters)	(US\$ 1,000)	(Cubic Meters)	(US\$ 1,000)
U.S.A.	0	0	0	0
Malaysia	597	238	1,862	721
Indonesia	1,702	774	5,771	2,553
Laos	320	127	448	138
Taiwan	233	43	2	3
Singapore	0	0	263	109
Myanmar	110	45	0	0
Others	0	0	236	62
TOTAL	2,962	1,227	8,582	3,586

Table 11: Thailand's Lum	ber Exports in 1999 and 200	0			
Origin	1999		2000		
	Quantity	Value	Quantity	Value	
	(Cubic Meters)	(US\$ 1,000)	(Cubic Meters)	(US\$ 1,000)	
U.S.A.	11,139	11,680	9,284	13,871	
Japan	27,136	26,565	31,125	27,060	
Hong Kong	150,520	19,709	183,339	30,913	
Malaysia	4,098	843	14,139	2,378	
Vietnam	48,920	9,441	27,508	5,380	
Netherlands	4,320	5,524	2,955	3,506	
Australia	2,597	3,582	4,209	5,456	
China	17,441	3,466	77,780	14,304	
Taiwan	7,024	3,455	9,627	3,524	
Spain	1,873	2,790	2,366	3,407	
United Kingdom	1,722	2,322	2,361	2,697	
Others	12,467	19,118	13,704	17,966	
TOTAL	289,257	108,495	378,397	130,462	

Table 12: Thailand's Ven	eer Sheets Exports in 1999 ar	nd 2000		
Origin	1999		2000	
	Quantity	Value	Quantity	Value
	(Cubic Meters)	(US\$ 1,000)	(Cubic Meters)	(US\$ 1,000)
U.S.A.	100	469	156	672
Denmark	1,076	4,457	784	3,332
U.K.	163	652	155	612
France	132	747	186	841
Germany	96	396	196	562
Italy	71	439	66	351
Singapore	60	424	36	240
S. Korea	72	190	12	54
Netherlands	75	336	45	326
Taiwan	168	300	91	150
Others	516	1,475	415	1,240
TOTAL	2,529	9,885	2,142	8,380

Table 13: Thailand's Plywood	Exports in 1999 and 200	00		
Origin	1999		2000	
	Quantity	Value	Quantity	Value
	(Cubic Meters)	(US\$ 1,000)	(Cubic Meters)	(US\$ 1,000)
U.S.A.	30	25	76	31
Myanmar	505	133	12	3
India	971	584	1,878	1,046
Laos	47	21	65	27
U.K.	0	0	127	52
Israel	0	0	809	133
Others	43	37	433	181
TOTAL	1,596	800	3,400	1,473